

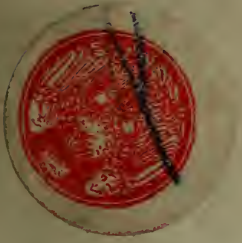
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AN EARLY SCENE REVISITED.

JOHN WITT RANDALL.

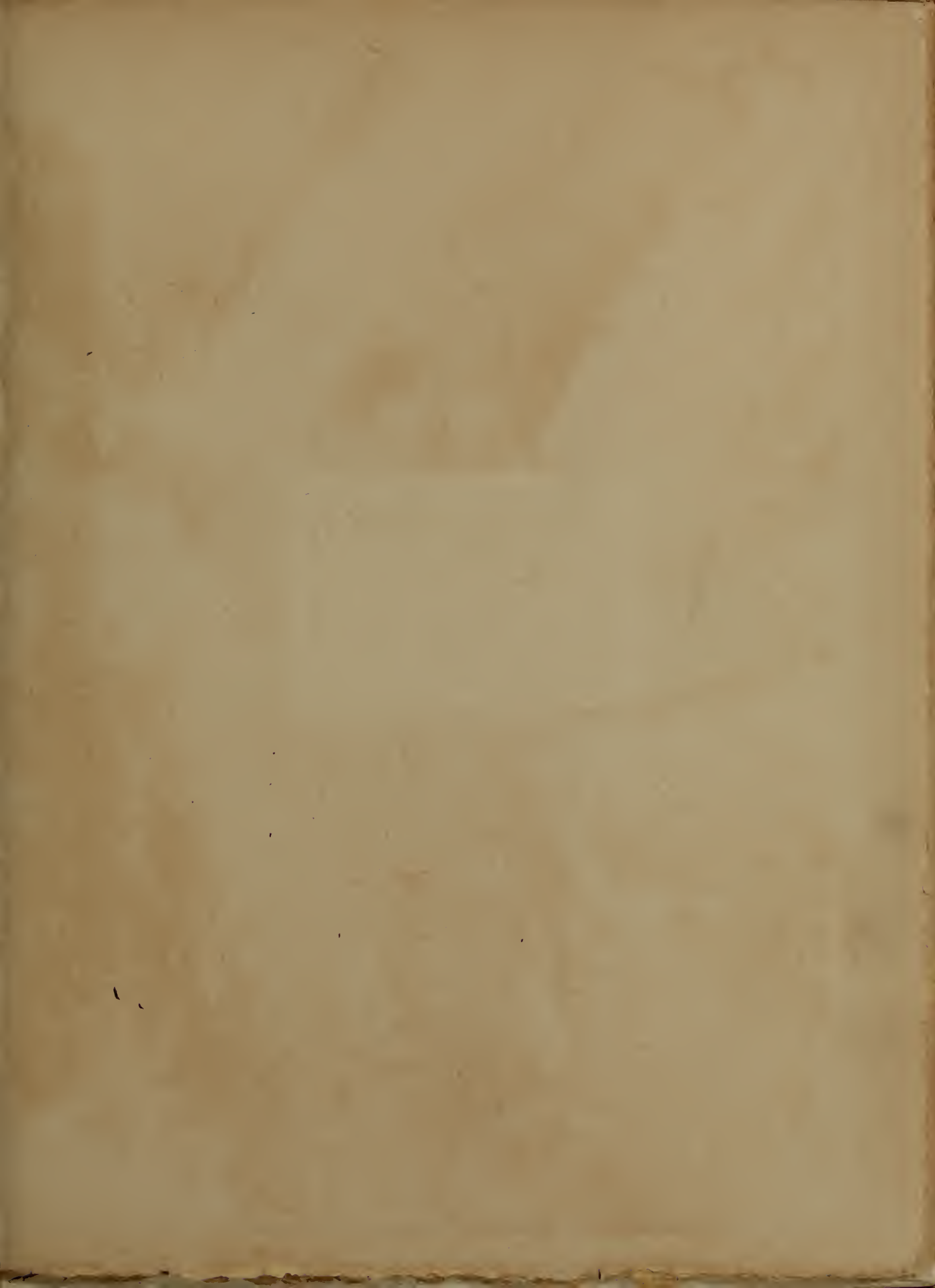


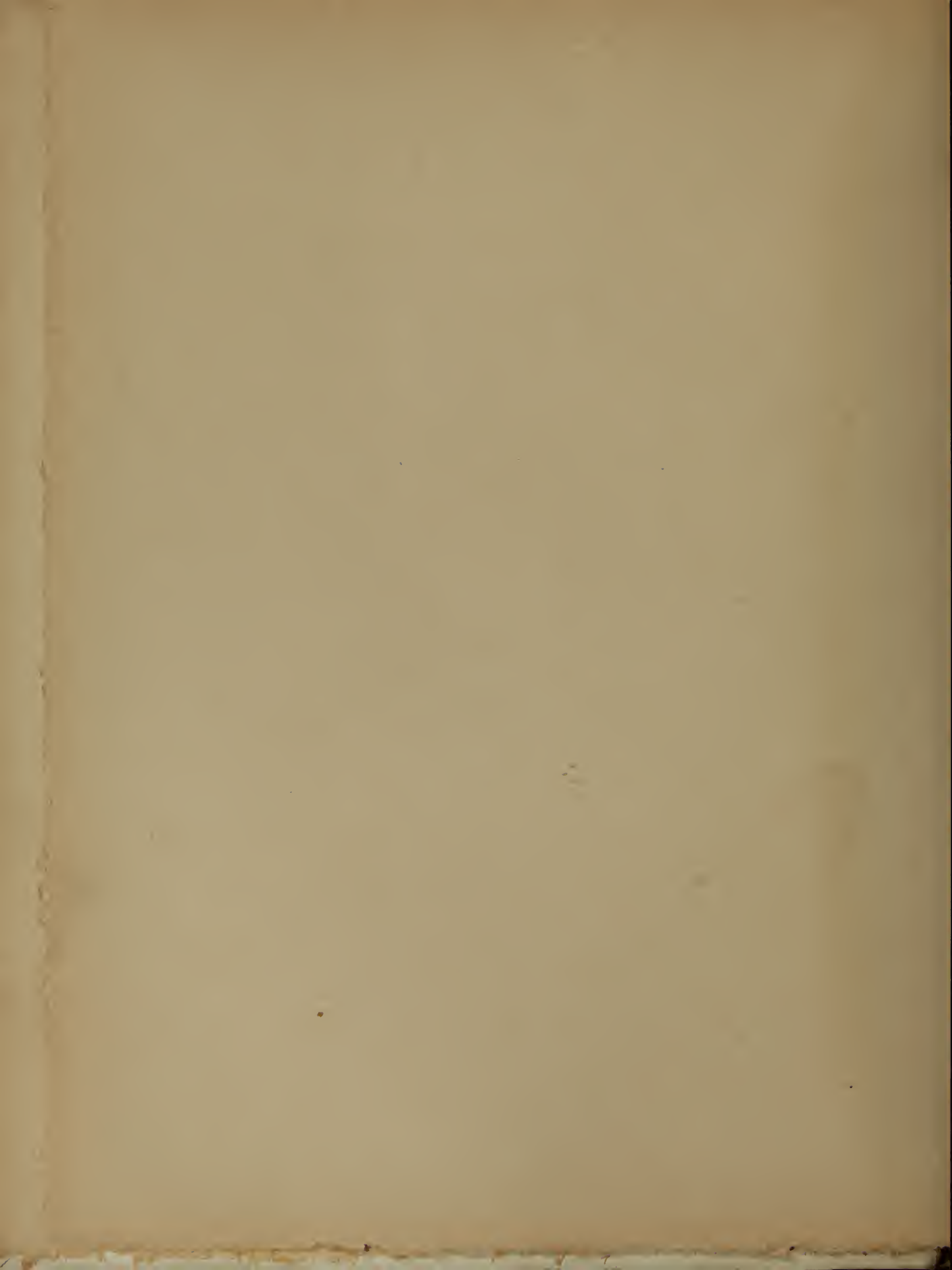
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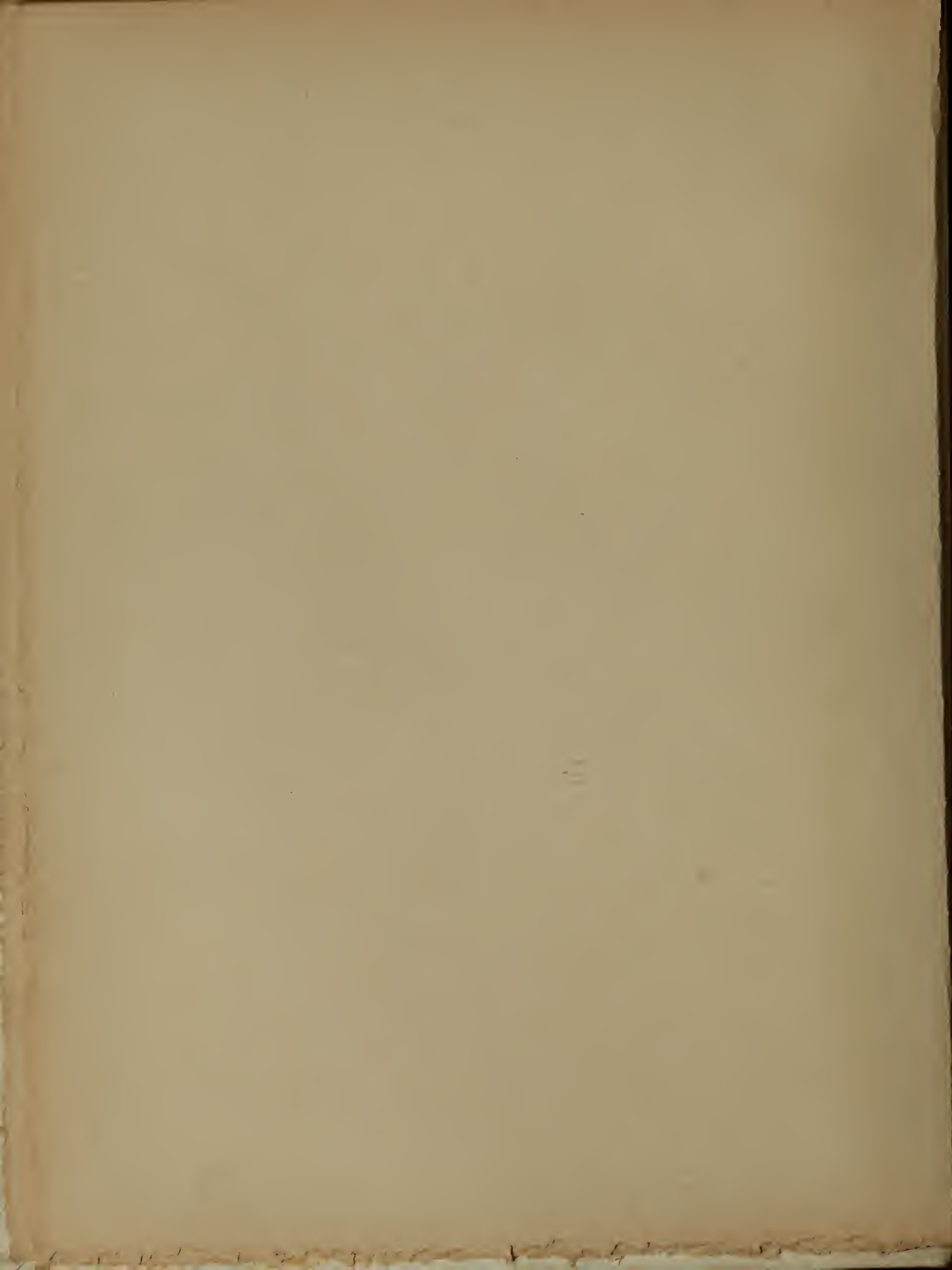
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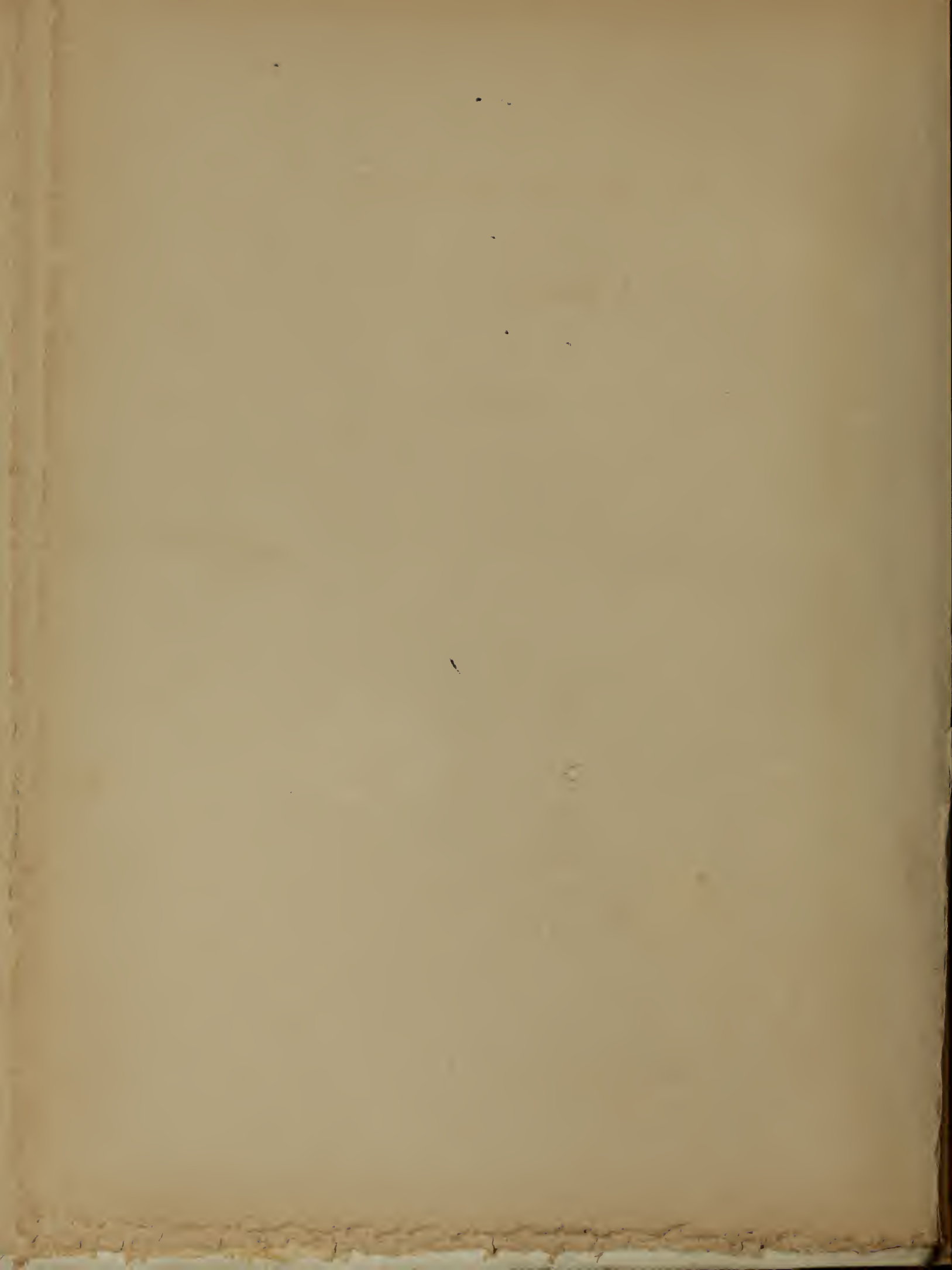














# AN EARLY SCENE REVISITED

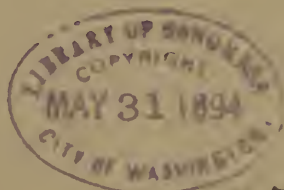
## A Poem

BY

JOHN WITT RANDALL

EDITED BY

FRANCIS ELLINGWOOD ABBOT



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CAMBRIDGE  
JOHN WILSON AND SON

University Press

1894

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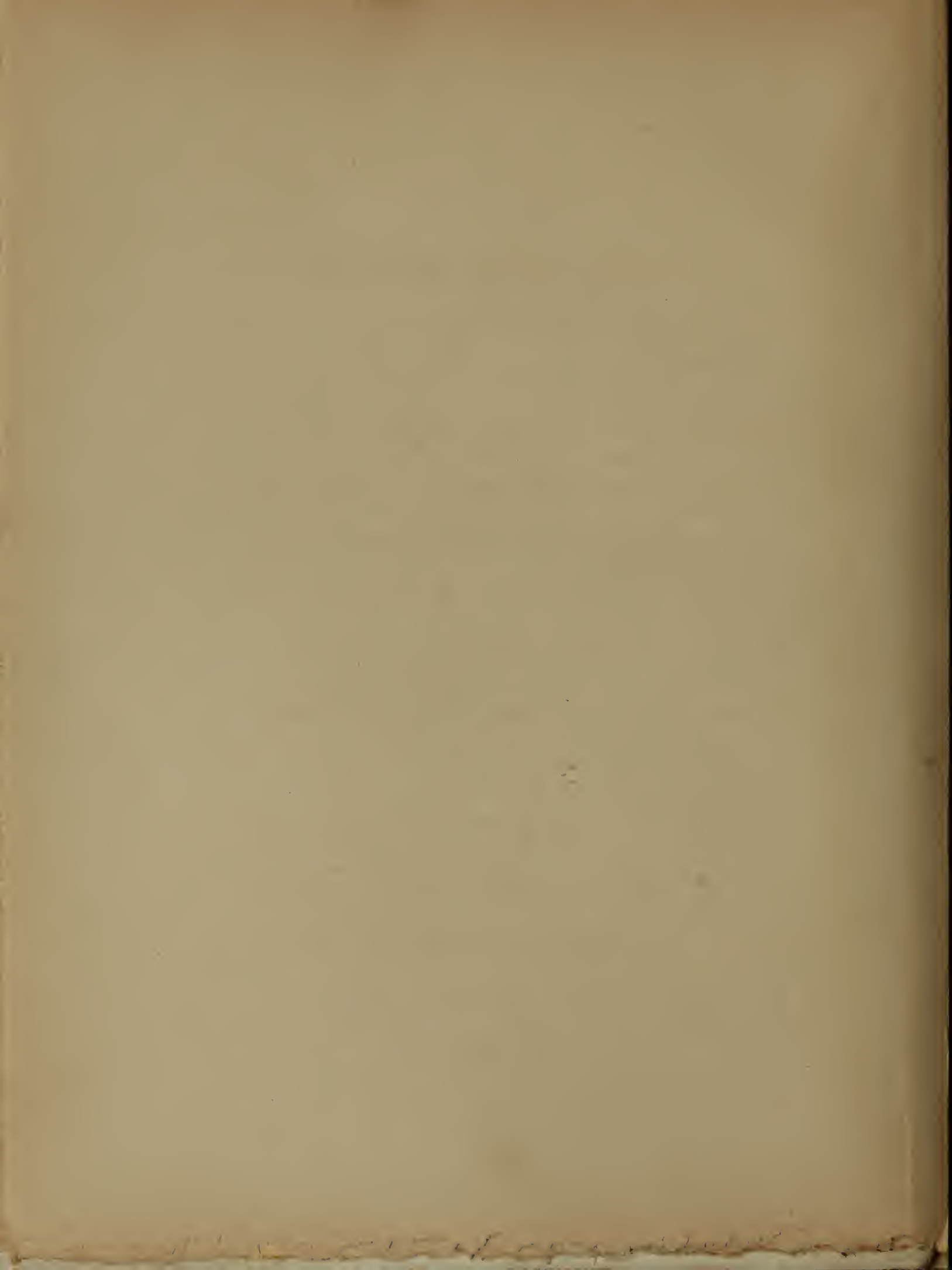
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AN EARLY SCENE REVISITED



## AN EARLY SCENE REVISITED.

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### I.

SWEET scene! Oh, how the sight of you once  
more brings to my mind  
Joys fled so long my very heart hath left them now  
behind!  
I move unknown 'mongst faces strange, where once I  
knew them all;  
Throughout the village there was scarce a dog but  
knew my call.  
Ye loved ones of my childhood, kind neighbors once  
so dear,  
I scarce dare look amongst these graves, lest I should  
find you here.  
All new! There's nothing meets my eye familiar as  
of yore,  
Save these dark, venerable elms, and the skies that  
arch them o'er.  
All round about my wondering eyes turn on from  
stone to stone,  
And note the friends that once were mine,—a list of  
names alone!

## II.

Yet one was here I cannot find. "Pray, Sexton, do  
you know  
A stone marked 'B,' was planted here some twenty  
years ago?"  
"I scarce can tell, and yet methinks just such a stone  
I've seen  
In the border of yon gravel walk, that runs across the  
green."  
"Why was it moved?" "Good sir, each spring to  
yonder rows are borne  
The stones o'er folks long dead, for whom are now  
none left to mourn."  
"I grieve for this, good Sexton, for the very spot I'd  
find  
Where sleeps the early friend who freshly yet lives in  
my mind.  
Fain would I stand beside the mound and let one tear-  
drop flow,  
In memory of the many tears I shed so long ago."

## III.

"You've known this town before, sir?" "Yes, and  
would I knew it still!  
Five happy years I spent at school, the school upon  
the hill,  
Hid in the pleasant linden grove; the house I do not  
see."

“You’ll see it, sir, from yonder walk; ’t is the soap-  
factory,  
And the linden-grove, a brewery, is knee-deep in mud,  
I trow.”  
“Alas, how beautiful of old!” “You would not know  
it now —  
Absent how long, pray?” “Twenty years.” “Oh, sir,  
this town is grown,  
And much improved since then; new buildings raised;  
the old pulled down.  
New streets and shops you’ll find; ’t was but a rural  
district then;  
A city now, twelve thousand strong, with mayor and  
aldermen.”

## IV.

“But the fine old church — I see it not! — all built of  
granite gray,  
Two rows of windows, and a spire that shone ten miles  
away.”  
“The fashion changed; they tore it down, and built  
whereon it stood  
Yon Gothic one, I think they call ’t.” “What, friend!  
That thing of wood,  
Whose pinnacles of gingerbread, that ever seem to  
quake,  
Shoot up from planks so white you’d think the whole  
a frosted cake?”

And the bell that rang so merrily, so mournfully that  
toll'd,  
I would not it were cracked, good man, for all its  
weight in gold."  
"It tolls no more, but, set in brick and turned up  
toward the sky,  
They sold it for a vat, sir, to the brewery hard by."

## V.

"And the good old clergyman, — he, too, hath long  
been gone, I fear.  
He had a smile for all who joyed; for all who grieved,  
a tear.  
Where is he? Tell me, is he dead? I mean old  
Parson N."  
"They kept him for a spell, sir, till his sight grew dim,  
and then,  
As they 'd built a brand-new church and put the pulpit  
in repair,  
A deaf, old, rusty parson, who had neither teeth nor  
hair,  
Seemed a mean thing to keep, sir; and so it came to  
pass,  
They could n't knock him in the head, but turned him  
out to grass, —  
Like an old horse past work; and yet they should  
have found him hay.  
They could n't afford a span, and so the old one  
turned away.



VI.

“The young one was right smart, sir, and had been  
upon the stage;  
Unlike the old-fogy preachers of the narrow bygone  
age, —  
Had no particular doctrine save that ‘battered bread is  
best,’  
But gave in words their money’s worth, and left to  
heaven the rest.  
His sentences were exquisite, and tipped full oft with  
rhyme;  
His hits and points like razors keen, the sharpest of  
their time.  
His greatest masterpiece each year upon Fast-day he  
read;  
He painted there the poor man’s doom who steals a  
loaf of bread.  
The rich all heard it with delight, but the poor (’t was  
somewhat queer)  
Lacked taste to admire a saint who spent three thousand  
crowns a year.

VII.

“One foolish fellow said the priest was too well-fed to  
preach,  
And Virtue’s standard set so high that none might  
hope to reach.

He deemed those words of warning with far greater  
weight would fall,  
If he himself had grazed upon the sour side of the  
wall.  
'T was said he 'd been a gambler, reformed some time  
ago,  
Which made him very popular; we could n't keep him,  
though!  
His salary was too small, and, when his preaching fit  
was o'er,  
I grieve to say he left us, and to gambling went once  
more —  
Has now become a candidate for Congress, as I hear;  
He failed last season, but they think to get him in  
next year."

## VIII.

"And the wise physician, friend of all the village, where  
is he?  
Near yonder corner, surely, the low brown house should  
be.  
A lovely brook flowed through the ground, and flowers  
of thousand dyes  
The green banks gemmed, and there we used to walk  
and botanize.  
The flowers, perhaps, have perished; hath the streamlet  
failed as well?"  
"The house was burned, some years ago, where stands  
yon brick hotel.

And the brook, that's now the common sewer, runs  
arched beneath the street.  
As for the man (t'was so he willed), yon rock is at  
his feet,  
With scarlet lichens crowned, and at his head a maple  
tree."  
"Ah, long-lost friend, how oft did I enjoy such things  
with thee!"

## IX.

"He used to wonder much that men, by superstitious fears,  
Should render death more dreadful than in Nature it  
appears;  
He oft would smile, in passing, at the figures on the  
stones,  
And say they ne'er should garnish him with death's-  
heads and cross-bones;  
And that no other monument should stand above his  
mould  
Than the maple, which in fall would glow in crimson  
and in gold.  
And now the pines and spruces, which gird his grave  
around,  
Already with their last year's leaves have carpeted the  
ground;  
And the maple soon, with crimson blush, will beautiful  
appear,  
And make his grave smile sweetly at the closing of  
the year.

## X.

“I’ve heard him say: ‘’T is very true that evil doth  
exist,  
And ’t is true the laws that govern us no mortal can  
resist;  
Yet, if we had the power to alter all things at our will,  
We still should say ’t were best that Nature’s law  
should govern still.  
And I’m glad to think so vast, although so dark, the  
Almighty plan,  
And that so little power to change hath been allowed  
to man.  
I often think within myself that this universe so grand  
Must be made for some good reason that I do not  
understand;  
Nay, I deem it joy, not sorrow, to be fated to submit,  
And, if I could, you may be sure I would not alter it.’

## XI.

“Once he said: ‘Men seek but little this brief life to  
adorn.  
They live so hard, almost it seems a pity to be born!  
Life, merely flecked with sorrow, they make a scene of  
woe,  
But the fault is not in Nature—she has not made it so.  
To do no wrong to any man, to wish all good to all,  
In God’s hand to rest trustfully, whether we stand or  
fall,

And a cheerful disposition, which a good heart ever  
brings,  
Can yield at least contentment, in the lack of other  
things.

We ask too much, and hence we lose the little that is  
ours.' ”

“ Oh, Sexton, give me one of those dear scarlet lichen  
flowers! ”

XII.

“ ‘ Men are slaves to pride,’ said he, ‘ much troubled  
about wealth,  
Though a hard crust with labor hard, good conscience,  
and good health,  
And the love of all one’s neighbors, is enough. If  
men were wise,

They’d smile to think that any should deem this self-  
sacrifice —

As if creed alone had made a rule of love for man to  
obey!

’T is but a fool his peace would seek in any other  
way.

And, as for labor, if,’ said he, ‘ it was the primal  
curse,

The blessed state of idleness were infinitely worse.

If men were more enlightened, how much happier they  
might be!’ ”

“ Reach me, good friend, one single leaf from yonder  
maple tree! ”

## XIII.

“Once he whispered with a smile, when the parson  
wished to each  
‘A blessed death,’ ‘A blessed life were worthier far to  
preach.’  
And again: ‘If, when a man might die, he could but  
truly say  
He had saved his honor and good name until he had  
grown gray,  
Had earned his bread (no more), did never wholly  
starve or freeze,  
Was never more than half his life a victim to disease,  
Had but kept one friend in twenty, howe’er greatly to  
his cost,  
Had loved and had been loved, and, though all else  
had long been lost,  
Had saved his peace of mind at last,—few so happy  
were as he.’”  
“A little bit of that gray rock, O Sexton, break for  
me!”

## XIV.

“He said, just ere he died, there were few lived half  
their days;  
Men with their bodies put their souls at war a thousand  
ways;  
That the senseless cramming of the one and the starving  
of the other  
Made man more cruel to himself than even to his brother.

'Dark hours,' he said, 'I've sought to make more  
cheerful all my life;  
I've ever aimed to free my heart from bitterness and  
strife.  
By art I keep a smiling face, though gasping now for  
breath;  
Do thou by art still make my grave look cheerful after  
death.'  
I said I would! His face grew grave, nor did that  
smile restore.  
I've kept my word!" "My thanks be thine! We see  
his like no more!

## XV.

"Now tell me one thing further, good Sexton, while I  
stay;  
I'll trouble you but briefly, for I long to be away.  
Pray, know you aught of two fair maids, perhaps no  
longer fair,  
Who in the Gothic College dwelt, that stands by Lake  
Sinclair?  
They were most kind to me of old,—sire, mother,  
brother, all,  
And gave me friendly welcome ever, both in bower  
and hall.  
I dare not visit—tell, I ask, are all alive and well?  
I ask, and yet I ask it not, and fear lest you should  
tell."

“Brentwood Hall, sir?” “Yes, the same! Now speak  
and quell my fears;  
Say that all live!” “You know, sir, much takes place  
in twenty years.”

## XVI.

“And now, friend, this is all I’d say; you know that  
boys at school  
Fall in love, and I with reason, as not used to play  
the fool.  
'Tis long ago, yet, when one day, we walked beside  
the lake,  
The younger gave a lily, saying, ‘Keep it for my sake.’  
Friends value such small trifles, and this to me was dear;  
And I thought ’twere sweet to show it safe and sound  
some future year.  
We danced together on the eve; we parted, and I said,  
‘Though twenty years must separate, yet, if I live, fair  
maid,  
This lily shall return some future day, and o’er the  
main  
Shall come, though scentless, back with me, to visit  
you again.’

## XVII.

“’Tis twenty years to-day! And I have kept it in a  
book,  
Pressed safely, hoping still, or by the lake or by the  
brook,



To show it yet unbroken, and say proudly, 'Do you  
know  
The little token that you gave so many years ago?'  
Just twenty years to-day it is — God grant she liveth  
still!  
Good Sexton, all these other things may perish if they  
will,  
And Fate will I forgive, may I but spend one happy  
hour  
In weeping for the buried past, with her who gave this  
flower.  
Just twenty years to-day! Lives she? Oh, speak and  
quell my fears!"  
"We were saying but just now, sir, *much* takes place  
in twenty years!

## XVIII.

"You knew these folks? I'd gladly tell things pleasant  
of the past;  
My cottage was their gift — times changed — misfortunes  
came at last.  
The family decayed; the father died; the only son  
For somewhat was disgraced, but I know not what he  
had done.  
The elder daughter left the place, and went I know not  
where;  
The younger, cheerful always, was unwilling to de-  
spair,

And to help the aged mother took in sewing for a while.  
And, when she died — 't was in my house — she pointed  
with a smile  
To an old book: 'I've nought but this; keep it, old  
friend,' said she,  
'And save the rose, for 't was the gift of one most  
dear to me.'"

## XIX.

"The rose was mine! Now will I go to the fair lake  
once more,  
View the old garden and the house, and wander on the  
shore,  
And muse awhile; then never will I see this place  
again!  
I thank you, friend!" "Nay, wait awhile, your labor  
is in vain.  
The house is gone, the garden too, the pond is walled  
about;  
An ice-house stands at every rod, half in the deep,  
half out.  
No beach there now." "Say, neighbor, was she buried  
by your hand?  
Pray tell me where." "Oh, stranger, look! Upon her  
grave you stand."  
"Nay, nay, forgive, sweet Spirit, in whatever world  
thou be,  
O thou that dwellest in my heart, that I should tread  
on thee!"

XX.

“O friends, and things I loved of old, and must you  
be no more?”

“Stranger, I lack myself the power of loving as of  
yore.”

“Old man! If all the world were mine, I’d give the  
world straightway,

Could I but make things what they were in that sweet  
olden day.”

“And I, if all earth’s wealth were mine, would give it  
with good will

To keep the wheel of change within the world’s mill  
turning still.”

“Happy must be the man for whom each moment is  
so blest.

You’ve had no sorrow, then; your heart beats quiet in  
your breast.

Friend, were there e’er such men, why, surely he who  
can forget

Past joys, nor wish them back, must find the present  
happier yet.”

XXI.

“Ah, think not, stranger, you alone in this wide world  
have cares;

There’s none were ever dear to me but now this  
churchyard bears,—

Wife, children, friends! Yet deem not I so little reck  
of pain  
That I would call the dead to life, and lose them o'er  
again!  
'T is true, my life is dull; I bury men from year to year,  
But am too old to whine, and now even change itself  
grows dear.  
I wish 't were swifter still, and oft the wish comes to  
my mind,  
When life seems weary, that I might but leave these  
cramps behind;  
And then I grow less hopeless of a world that's  
without pain,  
Where this poor, cracked, and shattered frame may be  
patched up again,—

## XXII.

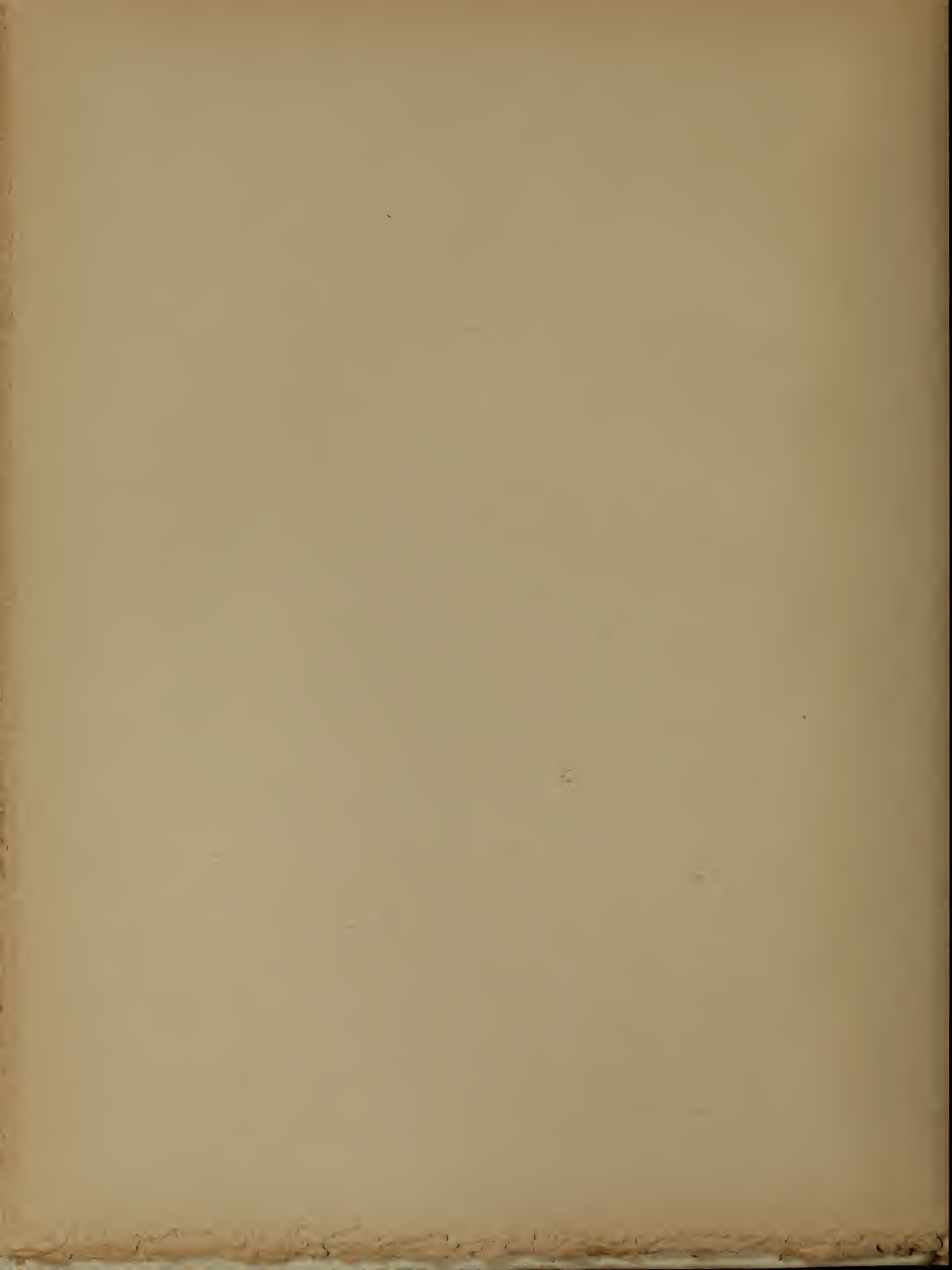
“The broken be made whole with all of which it once  
was part.  
There are more cares for me, 't is true, but I keep up  
good heart.  
Grave-digging keeps me warm, at least, and, the favor  
to repay,  
I hope some one with digging mine may sweat no  
distant day.”  
“God grant thee many, many happy days, old man!”  
“Nay, nay,  
My work is done; go home with me, or till to-morrow  
stay.

You wish to look about, and 't were to me a dear  
delight

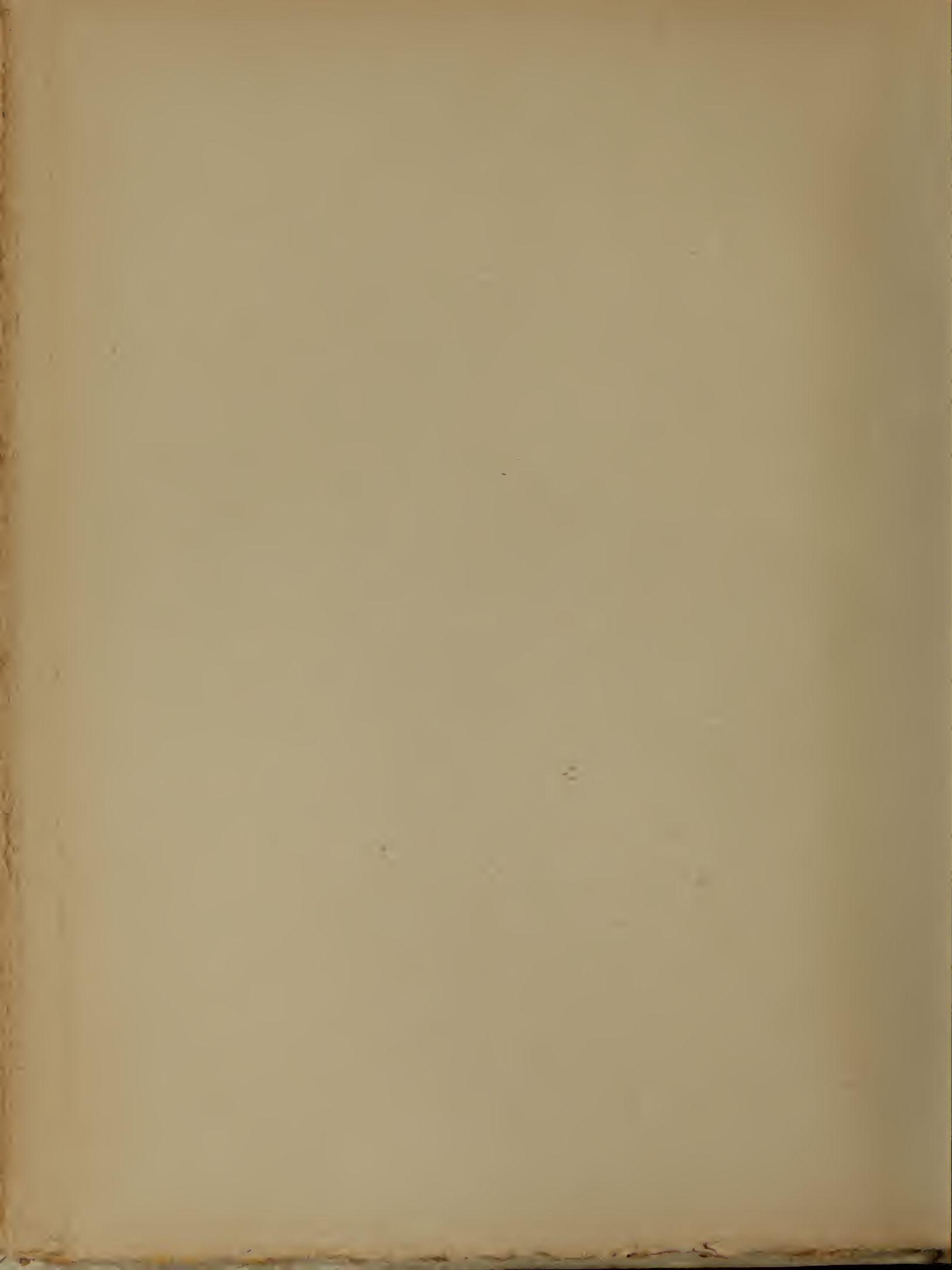
With one who knew this place of old, to chat through-  
out the night."

"I'll go!" "Thanks! thanks! and share my humble  
meal without disdain;

We'll drink the memory of old times, not wish them  
back again!"

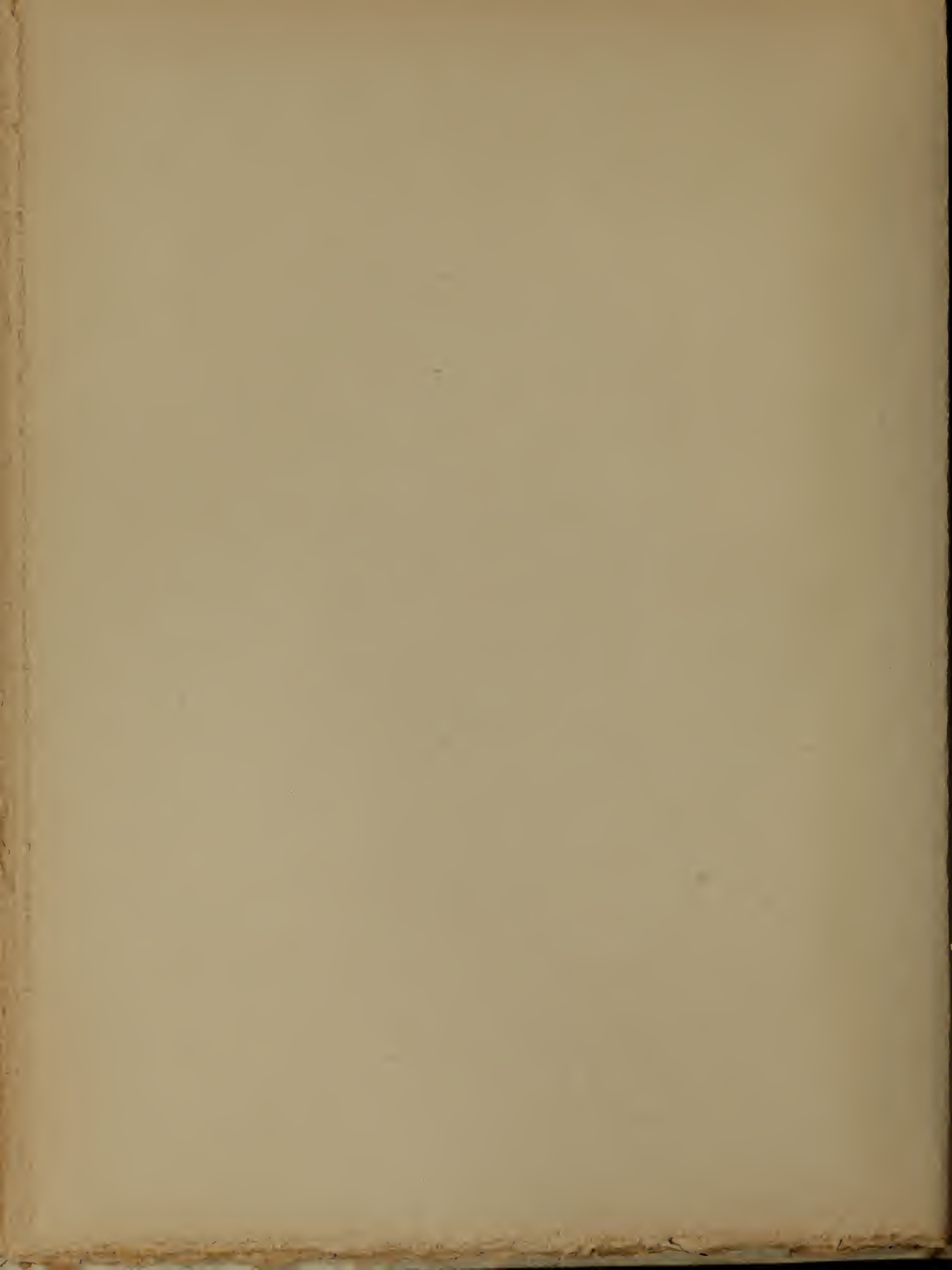




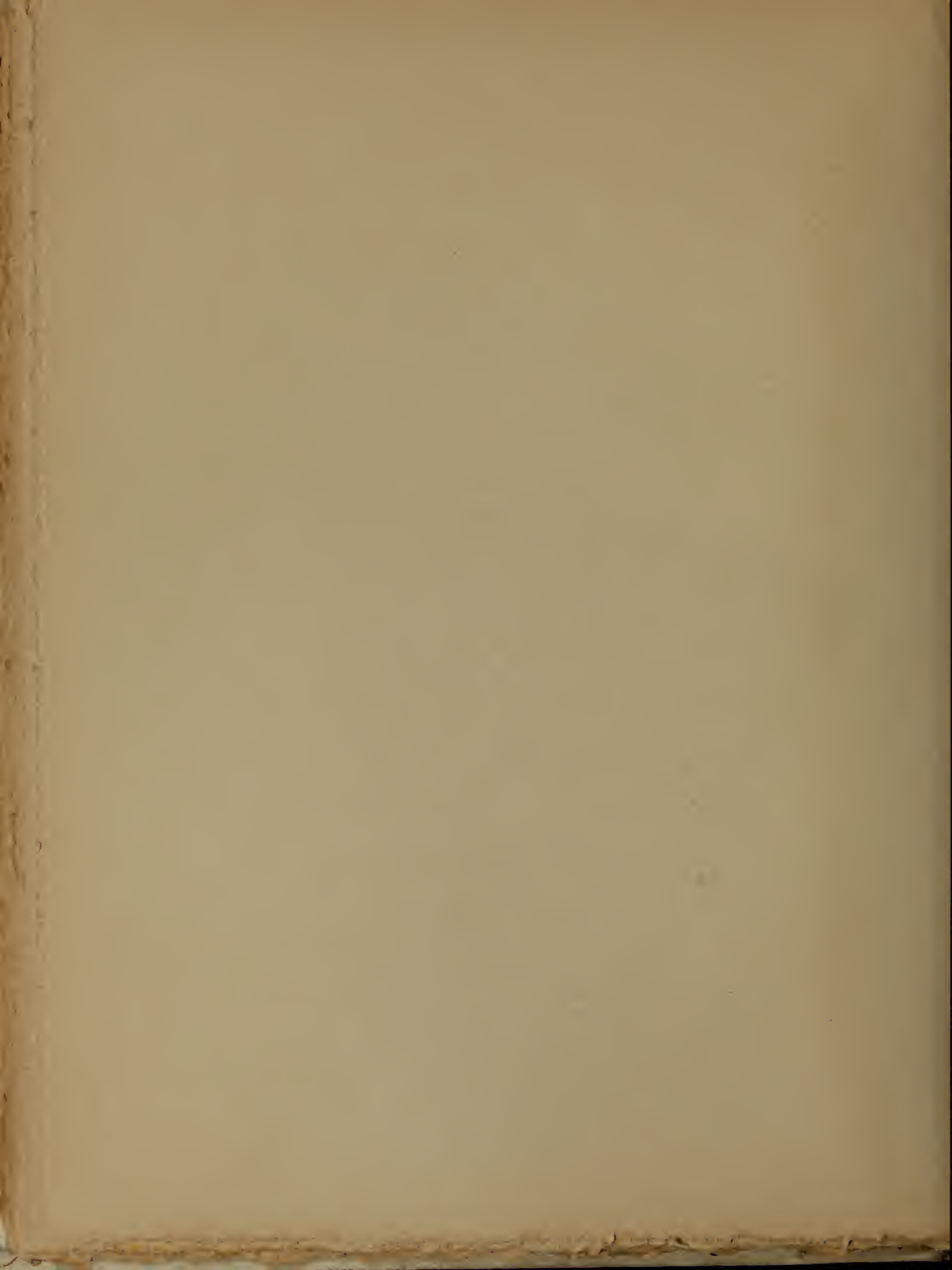




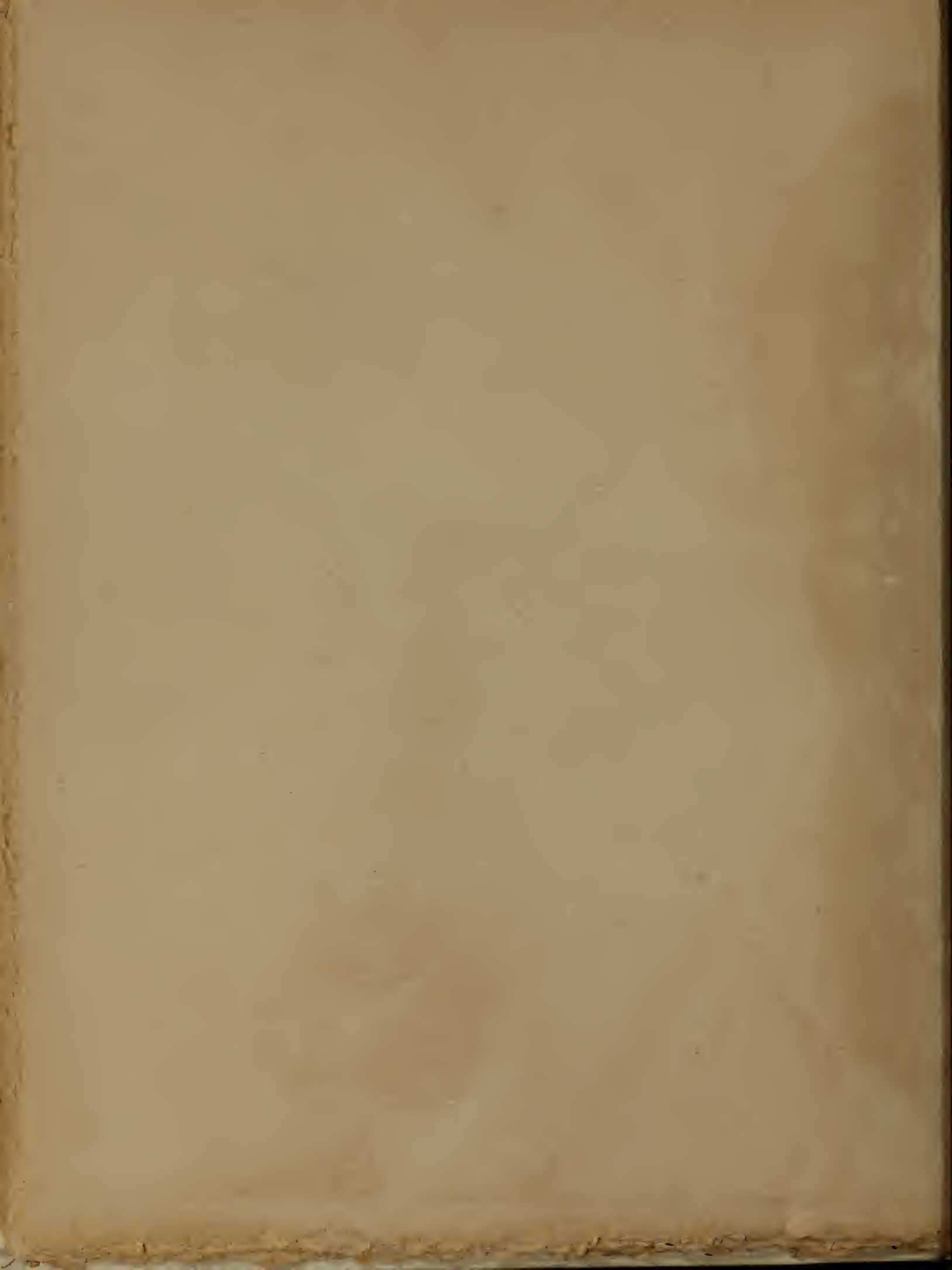






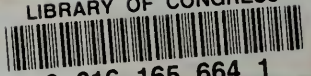








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